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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 000482

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DEPARTMENT FOR S/E WILLIAMSON AND AF/SPG
ADIS ABBABA ALSO FOR USAU
PARIS FOR KANEDA

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SUBJECT: SPLM SG ABDUL AZZIZ ON STRENGTHENING THE PARTY AND
DARFUR CHALLENGES

Classified By: CDA Alberto Fernandez for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: SPLM Deputy SG Abdul Azziz al Helou outlined his plans to strengthen the party's organization to CDA Fernandez, including training cadres, augmenting offices in the North, and developing a clear, consistent communications strategy, including its own media outlets. The SPLM hopes to bring all of the Darfur rebels under the umbrella of either the SLM or JEM for negotiations and is pressing SLM leader Abdul Wahid al Nur to participate in talks and allow his supporters to take part in the April census. End summary.

A Full Plate

¶2. (C) On April 1, CDA Fernandez called on Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement Deputy Secretary General Abdul Azziz al Helou to discuss developments in the SPLM in the run-up to the 2009 national elections and SPLM efforts to unit rebel groups in Darfur. Azziz noted how busy the SPLM is and said that in addition to serving as Deputy SG for Organization, he also is Chairman of the Organizing Committee for the National Convention scheduled for mid-May, as well as head of SPLM Darfur Task Force. He said that he is scheduled to travel to the Nuba mountains in South Kordofan on April 9, and invited the Charge to come along.

¶3. (C) Charge Fernandez agreed that the SPLM faces a full agenda, including CPA implementation, the Abyei dispute, he upcoming census and preparing for next year's elections. He said that the U.S. will try to be as helpful as possible, for example by assisting the SPLM to strengthen its offices in the North. The U.S. will not be able to do everything that is needed, however, and there are other things that are too politically sensitive for the U.S. to attempt.

¶4. (C) Azziz said that the SPLM carries a heavy responsibility. For its part, the National Congress Party has only one objective: to retain power. The NCP will resist any change. It was for change in Sudan - with democracy, justice, and human rights - that the SPLA fought during the civil war. It is now up to the SPLM to lead the political opposition to create a new Sudan. This will require that it successfully transitions from an armed resistance group to a political movement. It also means organizing the SPLM's grassroots support for the coming election.

Strengthening the SPLM Organization

¶5. (C) Azziz said that coming in as Deputy SG, he had found the SPLM's organization weak and he is implementing several steps to try to correct that. First, he plans to launch a two part party training program. A corps of trainers will be

educated in the fundamentals of the party's vision, its organization, and history. Then these trainers will train party cadres from the bottom up, prior to the coming elections.

¶6. (C) The CDA remarked that such training will be critical if the SPLM is to deliver a common message: that the SPLM is a national and not a regional party. Azziz agreed and said that the second part of his program is developing just such a consistent party message, first within the SPLM, then throughout the country as a whole, with the message that the SPLM promotes unity and its objective is a united democratic Sudan.

¶7. (C) The CDA asked whether this strategy will include developing the SPLM's own independent means of communication. Right now, the NCP has a near monopoly. Azziz said that this is now under discussion. He is seeking funds for SPLM television, radio, and newspapers in the party budget. The CDA agreed that such media will be critical to getting out the SPLM's message, especially in the North.

¶8. (C) Finally, Azziz said he will focus his attention and party resources on strengthening the SPLM's organization in Sudan's North, where SPLM offices have been underdeveloped compared to those of the South. The Charge agreed that the North will be the critical battleground in next years election, noting that the North is both a big challenge and a big opportunity for the SPLM.

Getting the Darfur Rebels Together

¶9. (C) Asked about the SPLM's efforts to work with the rebel groups in Darfur, Azziz said that the SPLM's strategy is to

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try to bring the rebels together and reduce the number of actors involved. The SPLM hopes to consolidate all of the Darfur factions within either the SLM or the JEM, then press the two groups to work together to develop a common negotiating position between them.

¶10. (C) The CDA commented that last summer, the UN and AU had dismissed the SPLM's work with the Darfur rebels. Only the U.S. and Norway had recognized that the SPLM was doing useful work that now is bearing fruit. Azziz said that the SPLM has the advantage of having known all the actors for a long time.

Getting Abdul Wahid to the Table

¶11. (C) Azziz said that he had met in Paris recently with SLM leader Abdul Wahid, who he described as confused and suspicious of the SPLM. He said that Wahid fears being isolated from his field commanders, who the SPLM has been hosting for talks in Juba. Azziz urged Abdul Wahid to leave Paris and exercise leadership over his SLM faction in Darfur. He said that Wahid has been invited to come to South Sudan on several occasions and always has refused. Now he has agreed to authorize a delegation from his faction to meet with other groups. The CDA noted that this is at least a step in the right direction. The SLM will need to talk to the NCP eventually and it will need to be well prepared before it does. He added that the longer the SLM allows the situation to drag on, the worse will be conditions for its followers in Darfur.

Census

¶13. (C) The Charge then commented on Abdul Wahid's call on his supporters to boycott the approaching national census. Such a boycott would be counterproductive and only would further marginalize Darfur's population, he said. Azziz said that the SPLM is trying to get the SLM to participate. The Charge commented that there is not much time left.

¶14. (C) Azziz mentioned the SPLM,s efforts to include questions on ethnic and religious identity in the census. He was still confident that such questions will be included. CDA commented that the SPLM hopes that with these questions included, the census will demonstrate that Sudan is not a predominantly Arab country, as the NCP claims. Azziz said that including such questions also is important under the CPA in the Three Areas, where civil service jobs are to be divided proportionally by ethnic group. Including ethnic questions on the census will supply the needed information.

Darfur Action Plan

¶15. (C) Azziz said that the SPLM needs U.S. support for its Darfur initiative and that it is preparing its plan of action for Darfur, which it will share with the U.S. The Charge suggested that it would be good to get Vice President Kiir to visit one of the Darfur IDP camps, something that President Bashir cannot do. He commented that the Darfurians are among Sudan's alienated and marginalized people, and should be naturally aligned with the SPLM. But while they hate the NCP, they do not trust the SPLM either, believing they were left out of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Azziz lamented the bad timing of the Darfuris, with whom he had fought against Khartoum in the civil war (in addition to fighting in his native Nuba mountains). "If they had revolted only four months sooner, we would have made it to the Presidential palace and would not be sharing power with the NCP. The rebels were just too late."

¶16. (SBU) The Charge and Azziz agreed to stay in close touch. CDA emphasized that the SPLM,s efforts in the North will be key to success. Azziz said that USG support for this effort would be most welcome and the SPLM will be grateful.

Comment

¶17. (C) Abdul Azziz appeared confident and with a clear grasp of the challenges ahead for the SPLM. He strongly endorsed delivering a clear, consistent SPLM message on national unity for the 2009 elections and appears to recognize that the SPLM must challenge the NCP in the North if it hopes to gain ground in elections. We are far less confident than he that Abdul Wahid come around to supporting the census and that ethnic/religious affiliation questions will be included on census forms.

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FERNANDEZ